SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

Local and Kinship Grouping

Descent and succession to offices and the inheritance of rights to land and other property are normally patrilineal among all Nupe. At the same time kin ties traced through the mother may afford opportunities for advancement and, especially in Bida the capital, maternal connections with persons of rank may be used to advantage in the political sphere. The Nupe term *dengi* connotes kinship in the widest sense to include all recognized cognates, but the effective *dengi* of an individual consists mainly of his agnates or patrilineal relatives descended from a common ancestor several generations back. Maternal kin ties, on the other hand, are rarely traced or effective beyond one or two generations. Groups of male patrikin are significant both as the nuclei of residential groups in extended families and in the status system of the chiefdom.

The domestic unit is usually an elementary or polygynous family, i.e., a man, his wife or wives, and unmarried children.[1] This, or a larger group consisting of a man, his wives, married sons, their wives and children, or of a set of brothers, their wives, children, and grandchildren, the nucleus of which is thus a patrilineage of small span, inhabits a division of the compound, keeps house and eats in common, and forms a single productive or labour unit. No special name exists for this group apart from that referring to its organization as a labour unit or *efakó*. The larger unit was formerly general, but under modern conditions the family has tended to divide when sons become adult. The domestic family normally forms part of a larger social unit, the "house" (*emi*), which is both a kinship and a territorial group and may also be referred to as a *katamba*, a term for the common gateway or entrance to an enclosed compound. An *emi* may be localized in one compound or may be distributed over a number of adjacent compounds, occupying either the whole or part of a ward (*efu*). In Bida the *emi* tends to be more widely scattered. The nucleus of an *emi* again consists of a body of patrikin to which wives and others are attached. Its head is known as the *emitsó* ("owner of the house"), a position which falls to the senior male member of the group, who is succeeded by the next in seniority of the same generation, and so on. When a section of an *emi* separates physically it continues to recognize its former head while he lives, but on his death it often attains an independent position with its own head. The size of the *emi* varies considerably. In Bida, those of commoners are often small and may contain no more than six or eight individuals; in the smaller settlements and among the nobility they may include as many as 60 persons.

Beyond these groups the Nupe also often recognize kinship over a still wider field. Thus a whole village may be regarded as descended from one ancestor, but such essentially mythical kinship links do not involve any specific kinship claims and obligations.

The three royal houses of Nupe may be regarded as large lineages or "clans," for they claim to observe rigid patrilineal descent believed to have proceeded from sanctified "first ancestors."

Forms of Settlement: House Types[2]

Nupe live in compact villages or towns (*ezi* is the term for both) which vary considerably in size; in Bida Emirate, besides the capital, there are three considerable settlements: Doko (800), Mokwa (2,000), Kutigi (3,000). Some, on the other

[1] Nadel, 1942, pp. 25–33.

[2] Nadel, 1942, pp. 24, 27–32, 34, 36– . 226–7; 1938; Temple, 1919, p. 334; Malam Aliyu Bida, notes, ed. Harris.